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SUBJECT: ELECTIONS SITREP 2: ORDERLY VOTING CONCLUDES,
TREPIDATION AS COUNTING BEGINS

REF: SANAA 2696

¶1. (SBU) Polls officially closed across Yemen at 2000L. International and local observers contacted by post universally agreed that voting was conducted in a generally peaceful and orderly manner. There were no reports of widespread violence and unconfirmed reports of isolated incidents were focused mainly in the provinces of al-Jawf and Dhamar. Official tabulation has now begun, and both election officials and observers expect that the counting will be tense and could produce additional violent incidents.

¶2. (SBU) Reliable sources confirm one casualty in Taiz from election related-violence previously reported (reftel). International and local media report individual deaths in Amran and Dhammar, but these have not been confirmed. A senior ruling party official and a spokesman from the Supreme Commission on Elections and Referenda (SCER) stated that a local election commission chief was killed in Hajja. Richard Chambers, Deputy Chief Observer for the European Union, said that EU observers have thus far not had any security issues themselves. Chambers remarked that the SCER has been very open in reporting violence and killings.

¶3. (SBU) Both the ruling party and the opposition have lodged a number of complaints with the SCER, but independent and partisan observers agree that the voting process has thus far been a significant improvement over the last national elections in 2003. Poloffs, journalists, and European and National Democratic Institute (NDI) observers all report high turnout and an upbeat mood throughout the country.

¶4. (SBU) European and NDI observers expressed concern that voting centers in the provinces of Mahweet and al-Jawf were closed due to violence. It is unclear how widespread the problem is, who is at fault, or if voters in those locations will be allowed to vote on another day.

¶5. (SBU) Judging from previous elections, observers and SCER officials have told post that they expect the counting phase to be tense with the potential to generate violence. While the electoral process has so far progressed smoothly, this next phase will be the true test of whether or not this election can be judged a success.

Krajeski